

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES



The Division of Nutritional Health and Services

Nutrition in Focus

Infancy through Childhood (0-12 years)

During Infancy through Childhood, nutrition plays a critical role in promoting optimal growth and development, strengthening the immune system, and enhancing social and cognitive ability. During the first year of life (infancy), the infant's weight should triple, and length should increase by 50 percent. By the time a child is five years old, the brain will have reached 90 percent of its adult weight. Lifelong food preferences and eating habits are shaped during Infancy and Childhood.

What are the consequences of poor nutrition?

- ⇒ Failure to meet calcium requirements in childhood can prevent the achievement of maximal skeletal growth and bone mineralization, increasing the risk of osteoporosis later in life.
- ⇒ Poor nutrition can delay cognitive and motor development, and increases the risk of infections, allergies, and anemia.
- ⇒ Inappropriate nutrition and inadequate physical activity increase the risk of overweight in childhood, adult obesity, heart disease, and other chronic conditions.
- ⇒ Baby bottle tooth decay, a leading dental problem for children under age 3, can occur when a child's teeth are exposed to sugary liquids, such as formula, fruit juices, and other sweetened liquids for a continuous, extended period of time.

What are we doing?

- ⇒ Assuring access to nutritious food for vulnerable children and adults through WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). (*Assurance*)
- ⇒ Educating teachers, nutritionists, and community-based educators to provide more effective nutrition education. (*Assurance*)

- ⇒ Partnering with universities to incorporate breastfeeding support education into nursing and post-graduate medical education curricula. *(Policy Development and Planning)*
- ⇒ Promoting breastfeeding and healthy behaviors through public information avenues, such as the *Eat for Health* and *5-A-Day for Better Health* Campaigns. *(Assurance)*
- ⇒ Supporting early nutritional risk assessment among children enrolled in WIC and in schools. *(Assessment)*
- ⇒ Designing a population-based monitoring and surveillance system that will assess the nutritional health status of all Missourians, regardless of age or income level. *(Assessment)*

How are we doing?

- ⇒ It is estimated that only 26.3% of Missouri infants are breastfed for 6 months compared to the national percentage of 30.7% (Mothers' Survey, Ross Products Division, Abbott Laboratories).
- ⇒ According to data from the Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System (1999), Missouri children 0 up to 5 years mirror the country in the rising trends of obesity.
- ⇒ The WIC Program and the CACFP are reaching an average of 91,676 and 52,687 participants, respectively.
- ⇒ The SFSP is reaching only 13% of eligible children.
- ⇒ The FMNP is operational in 9 of the 114 counties and the City of St. Louis.

What more can we do?

- ⇒ Promote breastfeeding during the first year of life as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics since breastmilk provides protection from diseases and decreases the risk for allergies.
- ⇒ Educate children and families about the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity.
- ⇒ Assure access to nutritional programs to children at risk and those with poor nutritional status.
- ⇒ Assess systematically the nutritional status of children in Missouri, identify emerging nutrition-related problems, and design intervention strategies targeted at vulnerable subgroups.

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